

Increasing Incomes and Food security of Small Farmers in West and Central Africa Through Exports of Organic and Fair-trade Tropical Products

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Abstract

Although Sub-Saharan Africa could supply a wide range of organic products to Europe, its share in European imports is small compared with other regions such as Latin America. Small organic farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa face many constraints, and they need support. In 2004, the FAO analyzed the demand for African organic products in Europe and the potential of West African countries to export these products. Following this identification phase, it formulated a project that started in September 2005 with funding from the German government. This project has helped 11 pilot groups of small farmers raise their production and exports of organic and fair-trade products, thereby increasing the incomes of the members and their families.

The objectives are that an increasing number of farmer groups comply with organic and/or fair-trade standards, enhance their production, become competent partners for the European trade, and raise their exports. The project provides technical assistance to producers to obtain certification and to export organic and/or fair-trade labeled products. More specifically, it provides training and assistance on:

- *Organic production techniques*
- *Organizational management*
- *Group certification (Internal Control Systems)*
- *Quality control*
- *Post-harvest treatments*
- *Marketing and export*

The project has a participatory approach. The annual work plans are developed by the groups and the project staff together, and on the basis of the work plans, contracts are negotiated through which the groups and exporters become responsible for executing the activities, with financial support from the project. In addition, external technical assistance has been hired where necessary, as much as possible from the country of the beneficiary group to favor the development of local support structures.

The following main results have been achieved so far:

- *Farmers have increased their technical skills and knowledge, and the groups have increased their product quality and exports. For example, in Burkina Faso, two farmer groups have raised their mango exports by 40%, while a women's group has tripled its exports of shea butter. In Ghana, a farmer group tripled its pineapple sales to their exporter. In Sierra Leone, a cooperative of over 1,400 farmers has entered the cocoa export business instead of selling to local middlemen for a low price.*
- *Farmer groups have improved their management and internal organization. They have become more effective in serving their members, whose participation in the decision making process has increased. Some of the groups have attracted new members (e.g. the cooperative in Sierra Leone has grown from 700 to over 1400 members).*
- *Two farmer groups have developed effective Internal Control Systems (ICS), and two more groups are currently developing their ICS. Two groups obtained organic certification, and three groups obtained certification against fair-trade standards.*
- *The FAO has developed practical strategies and instruments to help farmer groups gradually gain the capacity to export value-added certified products and increase their profits.*
- *The project produced a manual on import requirements and certification programs for exporters and producer groups in West Africa.*

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